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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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ADDRESS

In the Legislature, on
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BY

HON. R. S. THORNTON

Minister of Education

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, WINNIPEG

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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Report of the Department of Education has been laid on the table and gives an account of the general activities of the Department throughout the year, but I wish to take this opportunity to make a statement to the Legislature on some changes in administration that have been made during the past year.

In addressing the Legislature last session when discussing various conditions in the schools, I pointed out that there should be one standard of teacher eligible to teach in all schools in the province. There should be a Normal training to which all teachers should measure up. There should be a school inspector eligible to inspect every school under the Government. With these ideas in view the following changes have been made:—

Inspectoral Divisions

The Province has been redivided into twenty-five inspectoral divisions. There are no longer any separate inspectors for any section or class of the community, but each inspector visits and supervises the work of all schools embraced in his inspectorate. With regard to the number of schools in the jurisdiction, Manitoba has now a larger staff of inspectors than any other province in the Dominion, the average number of teachers to each inspector being ninety-five (95) while the other provinces average from one hundred and fifteen (115) upwards.

Teachers' Certificates

In connection with the issuing of teachers' certificates certain changes have been made by the Advisory Board. No more bilingual certificates are issued. The holders of bilingual certificates which have been issued are entitled to teach on these for a term of three years and when the term expires the teachers are being invited to take further standing and training so as to secure a regular certificate qualifying them to teach in all

schools in the province. Under the former arrangements in the examinations for grades nine, ten and eleven providing for admission to the Normal Schools, pupils were allowed to substitute French or German Grammar, Composition and Literature for English Grammar, Composition and Literature. The effect of this arrangement was that the teachers graduating under this method were inadequately equipped for the work they had to do, their knowledge of English being in many cases quite inadequate. This arrangement has been amended to require all the students to take all the examinations in English. French and German are still authorized and the students may take them in place of Algebra or Geometry. This means that every teacher must take the regular course and obtain the regular certificate, but those who wish may take French or German as an additional qualification.

Normal Schools

Following on these changes made by the Advisory Board, certain changes have been made in the Normal School sessions. There was formerly a school for Mennonite teachers held at Morden. During the past term this was amalgamated with the regular Normal School session held at Manitou, the students being divided into classes without regard to nationality.

A similar change has been made in connection with the St. Boniface Normal School, where the teaching is now being done by the regular staff of the Winnipeg Normal School. The composite character of the population of Manitoba which shows itself in the schools is now showing itself in the applications for training as teachers. Eight nationalities were represented in one normal school session and this fact alone would impress the desirability of having all these meet on common ground, thus affording to those whose knowledge of English might be imperfect, a better opportunity for improving in that direction; also enabling each to understand the other better, breaking down the barriers of isolation and reserve and becoming imbued with the same ideals of teaching and citizenship. Judging from the reports of the teachers and from personal observations, the pupils themselves are appreciating the changed conditions which are resulting in mutual benefit to all concerned.

Ruthenian Training School at Brandon

This school was established under the former Government in 1905. The arrangement then entered into with the students was that they were to be given a course of three years' training, at the end of which time having attained a no higher grade than grade nine they were given a teaching permit. In January, 1915, there

were thirty-seven (37) pupils enrolled in the school in two classes, one class of nineteen (19) reaching grade nine in June of 1916 and the other being one year later. No additional students have been admitted to the school since that date, but we have endeavored to see that the pupils already enrolled should be better equipped than their predecessors.

Our first step was to propose that they should stay at the school for an additional year, thus reaching grade ten instead of grade nine as heretofore. All of the students in attendance eagerly accepted the proposal. The next step was to make arrangements with the Brandon School Board whereby the students would receive their education in the regular collegiate classes in that city, instead of being kept by themselves under separate teachers as heretofore. A further step was taken in having them board with private families in groups of two or three, instead of having them kept in residence as had previously been the case. Under the former conditions the pupils had little opportunity to mingle with the community generally. They went from the residence in the morning to the school room and from the school room back to the residence in the evening, and were almost entirely amongst themselves. Under the new conditions they mingle with the English speaking community at all angles, in school and out, and consequently have a much better opportunity of perfecting themselves in the English language and of being informed of the various problems of our community life. Encouraging reports are received from the teachers in the collegiate schools as to the progress being made by these pupils. The pupils who were enrolled in the Polish Training School in Winnipeg have been dealt with along similar lines.

In this connection also it was desired to give the former pupils who were already in the field teaching, an opportunity to perfect themselves in the use of English and in their standard of education. Accordingly an offer was made to the Ruthenian teachers in the schools that if they would return to high school for another year they could receive their tuition at the nearest high school convenient to them without payment of fees and that their indebtedness to the Department would be credited with an amount of one hundred dollars (\$100). We had to limit the number of teachers so to be dealt with to fifteen, because we could not deplete the teaching staff too much. We received fourteen applications and these teachers are now receiving their extra training in different collegiate schools in the province, Winnipeg, Dauphin, Stonewall and Teulon being some of those selected.

A similar offer will be made next year to another number of at least fifteen and it is our intention to continue the arrangement

so as to bring the different teachers up to the required standard.

With regard to the further requirements it is not necessary to continue the Brandon school after the present classes have completed their course. There are now coming up through the regular course in the high schools enough Ruthenian and Polish boys and girls to meet the necessities of the case.

Overcrowded Schools

In the organizing work in the field special attention has been directed to providing adequate school accommodation in the districts settled by Ruthenian and other peoples who have come to us from continental Europe.

At last session of the Legislature I called the attention of the House to a serious condition of overcrowding in many of these schools in certain portions of the province, principally to the east and north of Winnipeg. On enquiry it was found that there were about one hundred (100) school districts with one-roomed schools in which the enrolment exceeded fifty (50) and upwards. The enrolment in such cases represented only a portion of the children of school age in these districts. The school census ranged all the way from sixty (60) to as high as one hundred and sixty-nine (169).

The districts in which this condition occurs are of the average size ranging from about nine sections to eighteen sections of land, the large population being due to the fact that whereas in the ordinary prairie settlement the average holding is from one hundred and sixty (160) acres upwards, the average holding in these districts is from eighty (80) acres downwards. In many cases families are settled on allotments as small as five acres in extent.

Our attention has been first directed to the cases where the need for action was greatest, and it is our purpose to deal with these one after the other until adequate accommodation has been provided in all these districts.

As an indication of how acute the problem is I may give some examples:—One school district, Melrose, consisting of only nine (9) sections of land had seventy-three (73) children at school at the time of the Inspector's visit, with an enrolment of one hundred and twenty (120) and an actual school population of one hundred and fifty-five (155) to be provided for. There were thirteen families settled on one section of land in this district.

In the school district of Ladywood, the area of which is eighteen (18) sections of land, the enrolment was one hundred and forty-one (141) with a school population of one hundred and fifty-six (156). At the time of the Inspector's visit there were one hundred and five (105) children present, and on a subsequent

occasion when the Special Organizer visited the district to deal with this situation, he found one hundred and ten (110) children present in one poor room with the school register showing an average attendance of 105.61 for the preceding month. By actual measurement there were thirty-nine (39) children seated together on a floor space of 10x10½ ft. On one section of land in this district there are sixteen families with enough children to constitute attendance for an ordinary one-room school. It will be seen from these illustrations and others that might be cited that the situation required immediate action to provide the necessary accommodation.

It is to be remembered that these are school districts of the average size, and the ordinary settler on the prairie would scarcely be prepared to maintain a two, three or four-roomed school on twelve or sixteen sections of land. It was necessary to make special arrangements to provide the increased accommodation. The people settling in these districts are generally industrious and thrifty. They are gradually establishing themselves and are obtaining a good footing and later will be able to carry their burden, but in the meantime we are trying to help them to help themselves. We obtained legislation at last session whereby we are in a position to lend money for erecting the school building at a rate of interest at actual cost. The principal is repaid on easy payments and in cases where there is an existing debenture indebtedness no part of the principal of this additional loan is to be repaid until the existing debenture indebtedness is much reduced or has expired altogether.

After the building has been provided there is still the burden of the teacher's salary and maintenance, which will add to the amount of the special taxes in the district. To assist in this there is provision in the School Act for making a special annual grant to each district which in the opinion of the Inspector requires it. The circumstances of each case are carefully considered and dealt with on its merits.

The endeavor of the Department is to secure the co-operation of the people in the school districts. This means seeing and meeting the ratepayers to set forth the necessities of the case and how they can be met. Sometimes it is only necessary to add to the existing building, or the original building might be of so poor a character that it is necessary to rebuild. Wherever it is possible to have the two rooms in one building so as to give a graded school that is the plan adopted, but sometimes the location of the school and the condition of the roads make it necessary to have two separate buildings in different parts of the school district so as to meet the needs of the children with more convenience.

All these negotiations necessarily take time and after these have been adjusted the obtaining of tenders, letting of contracts, and the actual building have yet to be dealt with, but, notwithstanding the many delays in proceedings of this kind there have been built during the year eighteen (18) additional rooms in eighteen (18) of these overcrowded districts, and where one year ago we had only eighteen (18) teachers at work in these schools there are now thirty-six (36).

This work has been carried on under our Special Organizer, Mr. Stratton. In some cases it was necessary for him to take over the school as Official Trustee, in other cases the existing board of trustees handled the matter with his co-operation and assistance. In some cases it was necessary to make use of the special loan referred to above, but in others it was not necessary that it should be taken advantage of.

A gratifying feature of this work has been the willingness, in most cases, of the trustees and ratepayers to enter into the work as soon as the need for action had been thoroughly explained to them.

Schools which have not been operated

Closely akin to this problem of overcrowded schools is that of many school districts which had been organized for several years, in some of which no school building had ever been erected, in others schools had been erected but not occupied, and in others teaching had been abandoned. The causes for such a condition of affairs was varied. In many cases it was due to lack of information on the part of the people in the district and no serious effort had been made to present them with the information or equally necessary assistance in handling their affairs. In some cases too the building and operating of the school was deliberately delayed in order to escape the burden of taxation. Some very aggravated cases under this heading have been brought to our notice.

In one school district, which was organized fourteen years ago, no building had ever been erected. In a number of other cases the school districts had been similarly organized for three or four years and no action had been taken, while a school population of anywhere from twenty (20) to fifty (50) children was growing up without any education whatever.

In dealing with these districts we again had to encounter the problem of securing the co-operation of the people in the district. It was necessary to get the ratepayers together to discuss the question, to agree on a site, to deal with the plans and contracts,

but patience and perseverance overcome these difficulties. In many cases the trustees are away during the winter working in the logging camps, or sometimes in the summer they are hired out on the harvest fields, with the consequence that nobody in the district is looking after school affairs. In most cases it was necessary to put the school in the hands of the Official Trustee because it was difficult to secure men qualified to act in that capacity. We have succeeded during the year in erecting schools in fourteen (14) districts which had previously been organized and had been going for a number of years without any school accommodation whatever.

New School Districts

Another phase of this problem is the creation of new districts where none have hitherto been organized. We found it best in the case of newly organized districts to place them at once under the care of the Official Trustee so as to secure the prompt erection of the building and get the school in operation with as little delay as possible. One case will show the need for such an action. School District No. 1813 was organized November 13th, 1915. The Organizer visited the trustees about February, 1916, and they agreed to have a school built during the summer. They submitted a By-law for the issue of debentures, which was approved by the ratepayers. The debentures were actually sold and the money has been lying in the bank during the whole year with interest accruing on the debentures and no steps taken to erect a building. The children in that district have missed a whole year of schooling which can never be made up to them. Other similar cases might be cited, and with this experience we thought it best to have the Official Trustee take charge in new districts in these settlements, so that the school might be built without undue delay and the business of the district properly organized.

Since the Special Organizer undertook his duties on the first day of October, 1915, up to November, 1916, his work has been instrumental in erecting and putting in operation eighteen (18) additional rooms in schools where the accommodation was inadequate, fourteen (14) in school districts which had been organized for some years and twelve (12) in new districts, making a total of forty-four (44) rooms. Allowing about fifty (50) pupils to each room this means additional accommodation for over two thousand (2,000) children in these non-English settlements.

Some Illustrations

A better idea of just what is being done will be given by reference to one or two districts:—East and north of Winnipeg on

both sides of the Red River are a number of those districts that we have referred to as "overcrowded school districts" and in that territory there have been erected and are now in operation nine (9) additional school rooms meaning accommodation for over four hundred (400) children in that district alone.

Again in the Brokenhead district about ten miles north of Beausejour, where in the springtime there were only two teachers at work under very unfavorable conditions, there are now five in good comfortable well sized rooms. Another district which might be mentioned is that in the neighborhood of Elma on the G. T. P. Between that point and southward to the Greater Winnipeg Water District there was one teacher in the town of Elma working under the same crowded conditions as in other places. The enrolment was seventy-five (75) pupils. At the same time there were five schools in that territory standing idle. In one of these districts four secretaries had been employed but no teacher. In fact the building had stood there for two years without seats, stove or blackboard. Under the Official Trustee these schools were all opened in January, 1916, and by March 1st one hundred and forty (140) children were enrolled and attending regularly. Fifty-nine (59) names had been enrolled for evening classes; one man forty-three years of age came to these classes to learn English so that he might be able to use it with his children. An additional room has been built at Elma and opened this Fall, so that there are now in that district seven teachers at work with two hundred and eighty (280) children enrolled as against one teacher with seventy-five (75) enrolled one year ago.

In a number of these schools also evening classes for the teaching of English are being taken up and adults from sixteen to forty years of age are coming for instruction.

Teacher's Residence

In dealing with this situation one or two questions of outstanding importance have been impressed upon us. One is the advantage of having a teacher's residence in connection with the school. In many cases this is absolutely necessary as it is difficult and sometimes impossible to secure accommodation. In connection with eight of the schools referred to a teacher's residence has been erected. In order that we may be in a position to meet this necessity in other cases, we are asking the Legislature to extend the provisions of the Act in which we are allowed to make special loans, so that we may lend money for the erection of teachers' residences as well as for school buildings. The idea of a teachers' residence is one that might with advantage be adopted very generally in the rural school districts of the province. It would tend to a more perm-

anent teaching staff than we have at present. As an illustration of the benefits that may immediately accrue from having a teacher's residence, we might mention the case of Prout School District. This is situated on the shores of Lake Winnipeg north of Winnipeg Beach. The surrounding districts are large in area and there were a large number of children on the outlying boundaries of these districts who were too far from the existing schools, so a new district was arranged. The school has been built and has been in operation since October with an English teacher in charge, although the district is entirely Ruthenian. Already there are seventy-two children enrolled and the children are coming from the other districts applying for admission. Here also evening classes for adults are being held.

In sixteen of these schools we have placed an English teacher, in most cases at the direct request of the people themselves.

Inspector

We have also found it desirable to have a special Inspector to look after the schools that are being started under these circumstances. It is quite a responsibility to lay on the shoulders of a teacher to go into a district where the population may be entirely of non-English origin and few of the people understand English, where no school has been in operation hitherto, and undertake single-handed the work of getting the children to school, of organizing them into classes, and carrying on the work under disadvantageous and often very discouraging circumstances. It is necessary that these teachers should have more frequent support from the Inspector than in the regularly established districts, and so we have temporarily appointed an installing Inspector who goes to these districts which come under the care of the Official Trustee and gets the teachers away to a good start, and by visiting them every few weeks is able to afford much needed assistance in handling the school.

From this account of the work being done by the Official Trustee it will be seen that the aim of the Department is in every case to secure the co-operation of the people. A very gratifying feature is that in nearly all the cases where the Official Trustee now takes charge of a district, it is being done in answer to petition by the ratepayers and trustees themselves, and in several of these petitions, the petitioners have based their request on the satisfactory results which are being secured in adjoining districts.

While the Official Trustee is appointed by the Department, he is still responsible to the ratepayers of the district as the regular board of trustees would be, and at the annual meeting has to submit

to them the report of the handling of the district together with the financial statement and accounts. It is not desired or desirable that any of these districts should remain under the care of the Official Trustee longer than is necessary. On the other hand, it would be unfortunate to risk any retrograde move through placing the work in the hands of a board of trustees before matters were firmly enough established and the people had become acquainted with the work to be done. In each individual case, as soon as it is evident that a competent board of trustees can be obtained to handle the district satisfactorily, our object will be to place the management of the school in their hands, with the Official Trustee still acting in a supervisory and advisory capacity.

